

SEE TIME FLY

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HISTORY STORIES

SPECIAL

U.S. Constitution

Nanci Bell

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George Washington

1732-1799



Washington Crossing the Delaware, by Emanuel Leutze, 1851

This new Flight is about one of the men who created the United States. We call these men Founding Fathers. George Washington was probably the tallest, at six feet tall. Imagine a guy that big riding on a horse! Must have been a big horse.

George fought in the French and Indian Wars in loads of battles and was even a captive of the French for a time. That's brave! I don't bite the dog down the street, but not the kind of war George fought in! He kept a diary, and it was published, making him famous in the colonies.

War is never pretty but sometimes it becomes necessary. If I go to war again, no sword or other weapon can make up for these claws. But George had to fight without enough weapons! I guess he and his men wanted independence and were willing to fight and die for it. Luckily, we enjoy that independence today. Well, I do, except that I can't fill my own food bowl.



1

Born on his family's large farm at the edge of the Virginia woods, George Washington learned early to be strong, and this served him well later as the first president of the United States. With his father often away, young George worked in the fields and tended to the animals. When his chores were done he was free to go ride his horse, an escape he loved all his life. But George was just 11 when his father died, and he became the man of the house. He quit his studies and worked from dawn to dusk.

1. Do you think George got his chores done quickly? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think George had to work in the fields?
3. Do you think George had a lot of work to do, or a little? Explain.
4. Do you think George had much time to play or ride his horse after his father died? Why or why not?
5. Why do you think George quit his studies when his father died?

2

By the time he was 14, George yearned for adventure. He argued with his mom about joining the British Navy. Still grieving his father's death, his mom would not allow him to go. At 15, the frustrated boy taught himself how to map land and survive in the dense woodlands he lived in. His hard work and attention to detail helped him learn these skills. As soon as he was 21 he joined the colonial militia. The British signed up the tall, determined young man as war brewed with the French colonies further inland from the English colonies.

1. Why do you think George wanted to join the British Navy at 14?
2. Why do you think George's mother did not want him to join the Navy?
3. Do you think George's mother was happy when he joined the militia? Why or why not?
4. Do you think George would have learned to map and survive in the dense woodlands if he had joined the Navy? Explain.
5. Do you think George's skills as a woodsman helped him fight the French colonists? Why or why not?



3

Hardworking Washington rose in rank to officer quickly in the colonies' militia. He made up for his lack of proper training by poring over books about famous battles and strategies late each night in his tent. He soon gained fame for his courage in the French and Indian War. He once had two horses shot from under him during one battle. Later that day he found bullet fragments in his hair and holes in his coat and hat, but he was unharmed. The King of England issued a Royal Decree that stated that men like George, a colonist, could not be ranked higher than captain. For Washington, this would mean a step down. In protest, he resigned and returned to his farm at Mt. Vernon.

1. Why do you think George rose in rank to officer quickly?
2. Why do you think George read books about battles and strategies?
3. How do you think George's courage made him famous?
4. Do you think George was safe during the French and Indian War, or in danger? Explain.
5. How do you think George felt when the King of England decreed that colonists could not be ranked higher than captain?

4

Washington still felt a sense of duty to serve, so he joined the Virginia Congress. In 1775 folks in the colonies chafed at the many taxes demanded by King George III of England, and some spoke of war. George fanned the flames of "revolution fever" with his strong speeches in favor of a free and self-ruling country. When the colonies finally chose to go to war, they picked him to lead their new Continental Army. The British Red Coats were the most powerful army in the world, and Washington had to face them with a rag-tag army of farmers and laborers. His men were poorly armed and often lacked enough food to eat or coats to keep them warm. But Washington worked tirelessly to train his men and keep their spirits up even when he had his own doubts. He turned his men into a well-trained army.

1. Why do you think people chafed at the taxes demanded by King George III?
2. Why do you think some of the colonists spoke of war?
3. Why do you think George gave speeches in favor of a free and self-ruling country?
4. Why do you think the colonists only had a "rag-tag army of farmers?" Why didn't they have a professional army?
5. Why do you think Washington worked to train his men and keep their spirits up?





(clockwise from left) *Young Washington*, by Charles Wilson Peale, 1779; political cartoon by Benjamin Franklin, showing the colonies as parts of a snake; *The Battle of Bunker Hill*, by Howard Pyle, 1897; an aging Washington, by Rembrandt Peale, 1795



Having helped the rebels win the war for freedom from England, Washington hoped to retire back to his farm and family. But his officers wanted to make him the new king. George was horrified at the thought—he had fought the very idea of a king!—but he knew that the small nation would need a strong leader. He listened to men from the newly-unified states as they argued about how to run the new country. But when he spoke up, everyone else fell silent. When it came time to choose a wise, respected man to be the first president, all votes went to George. The battle-hardened veteran accepted, served for eight years, and then retired to Mt. Vernon a hero.

1. Why do you think George wanted to retire back to his farm after the war?
2. How do you think George felt about becoming the king of the United States?
3. Why do you think that everyone fell silent when George spoke up?
4. Why do you think people wanted George to be the first president?
5. Why do you think George thought the new nation needed a strong leader?

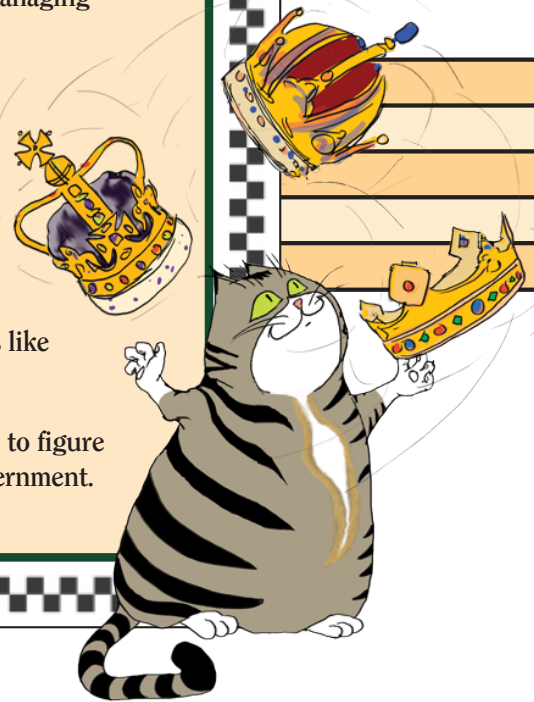


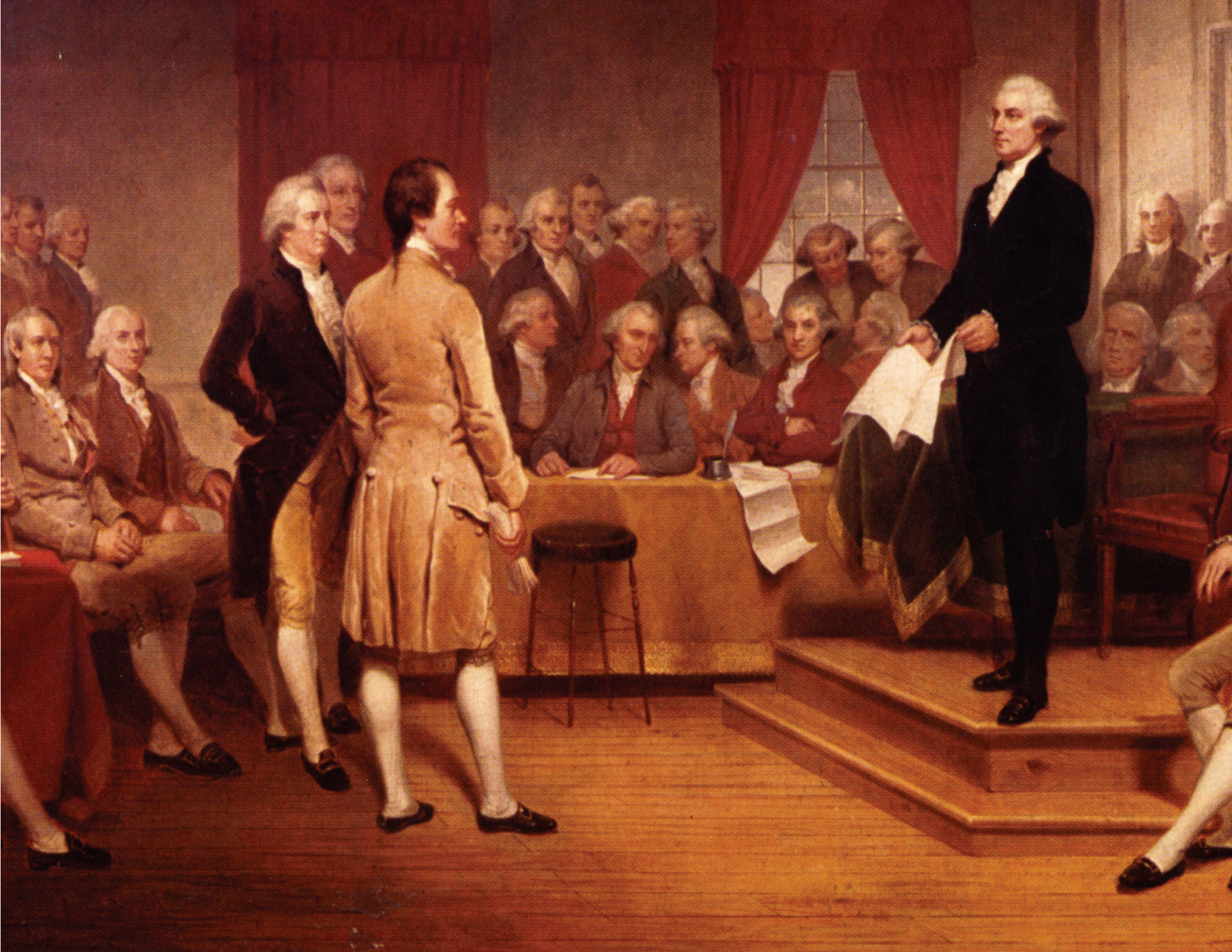
Ivan says—

After fighting in so many wars, I guess old George was pretty good at managing difficult people and stuff. You need that kind of experience to be in government. I tried to form a government in the neighborhood, but the other animals seemed to be like George...in that they don't want there to be a king, which would of course be me. Bah! What do they know?

So George was an important part of forming the new country of the United States of America, both on the battlefield and in peace. The idea was that a president was just one of the guys, just a dude, elected by the people, and not ruling over everyone else absolutely. This was a new idea, different from hundreds of years of tradition back in countries like England and France.

Your next Flight is about after of the war, when a few guys got together to figure out how to make a whole new country with a whole new (king-free) government. Spoiler alert: there was a lot of yelling!





Flight 2

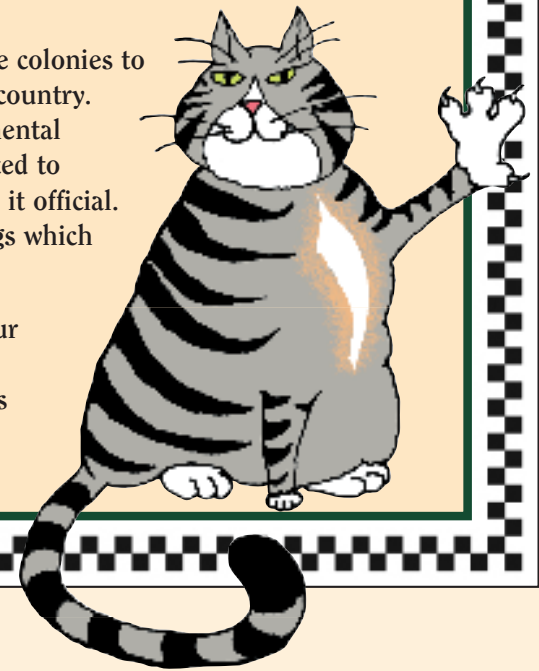
U.S. Constitution

1789

This new Flight is about the drafting of the U.S Constitution, a document that serves as the supreme law of the United States of America. It outlined the structure of the government, and it addressed a lot of ideas people thought were worth fighting for, including a democratic government, one in which the people, not a king or queen, decided things.

It wasn't easy for the men chosen by their home colonies to come to agreement on everything for this new country. They sent letters, held gatherings called Continental Congresses to debate and argue, and finally voted to ratify the Constitution, which means they made it official. The goal was unity, and a new way to run things which no other country had ever achieved.

Drafting and ratifying the Constitution took four years of guys in tights and wigs arguing. Not everyone got his way. We cats can decide things much quicker than that. It all about the claws.



Washington as Statesman at the Constitutional Congress, by Junius Brutus Stearns, 1856

1

When the Revolutionary War ended, many argued over what to do next. The colonies had banded together to fight the British. But now that was over, and the new United States did not have a government. Arguments raged on from grand old statehouses to city streets to filthy barrooms. Even the states argued—Maryland and Virginia both claimed to own the Potomac River. Many poor farmers felt that the state governments were no better than the British. No one was sure if the loose alliance of “united” states would hold or fall apart.

1. Why do you think people argued over what to do next, after the war ended?
2. Why do you think the colonies banded together to fight the British?
3. Do you think the *states* really argued? What did you picture for what the phrase “Even the states argued” meant?
4. Why do you think *poor* farmers did not like the state governments? Why not rich farmers?
5. What might have happened if the alliance of states fell apart?

2

In the spring of 1787, men representing 12 of the 13 states met in Philadelphia. Traveling from as far away as Georgia, the journey by carriage over dusty, rocky roads was slow and difficult. The first of the 55 white, rich men met on May 14, but it was more than two weeks before even half of the men arrived. As they slowly trickled into town, they debated for hours on end each day about what type of government to create. What most of the men could agree on was that no one wanted a king. They elected George Washington to run the meetings. When men raised their voices or pounded their fists on the table, Washington stepped in to restore order.

1. Why do you think the men traveled by carriage? Why not by car or plane?
2. Why do you think the states sent representatives? Why not have everyone discuss the new Constitution?
3. Why do you think the men debated for hours? Why didn't one of the men decide everything?
4. Why do you think no one wanted a king?
5. What might have happened if Washington did not step in to restore order?



3

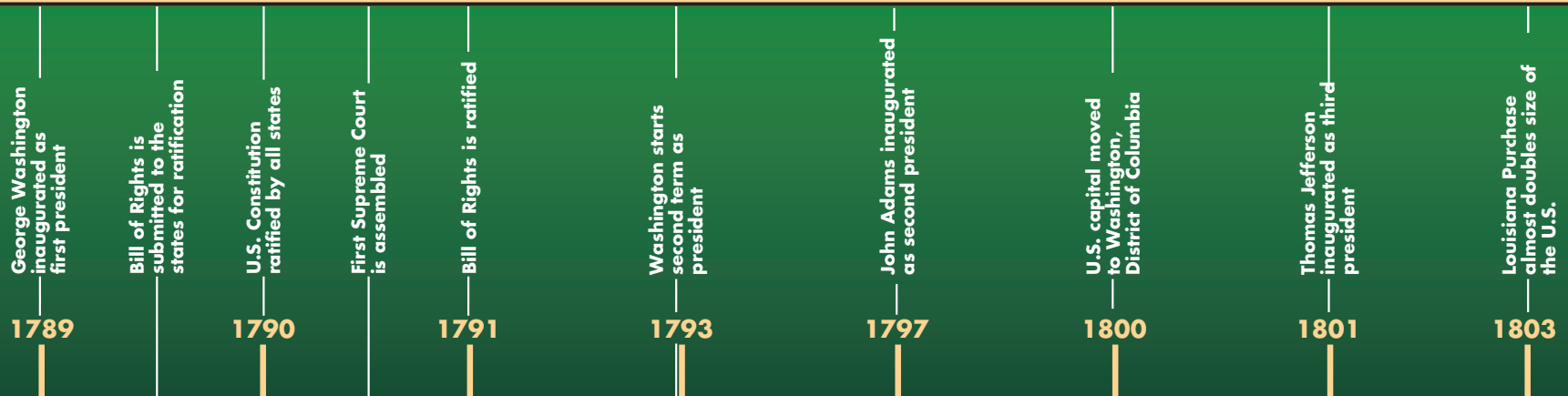
There were many bitter disputes between the men in the months that followed. Men from the small states wanted two men per state to represent all states in Congress, where new laws would be debated and voted upon. Larger states argued that this was unfair; since they had more people, they should have more men. Everyone finally agreed by creating two separate houses of Congress. Then the Southern states wanted slaves counted as people, too. Northerners countered that the slaves were treated as property, like pets or livestock, not people. The men bickered for days, and some of the southerners swore they would quit. At last they all agreed that five slaves would count as three actual people.

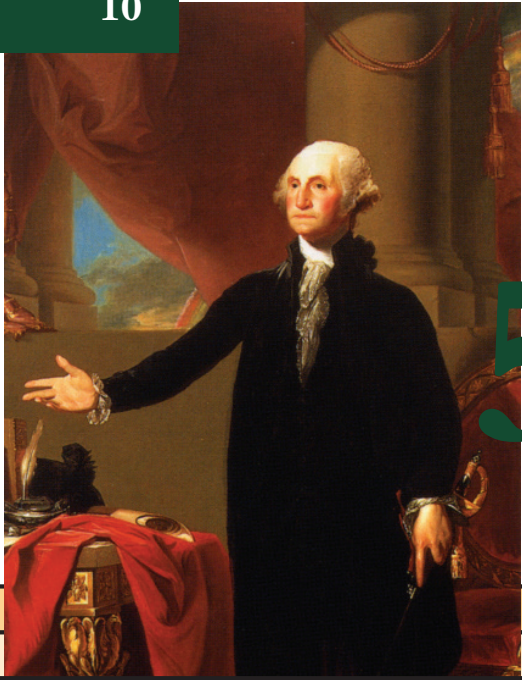
1. Do you think the men cared a lot about what the Constitution would say, or a little? Explain.
2. Why do you think the small states wanted two representatives in Congress per state?
3. How do you think creating two houses of Congress solved the dispute between the big states and small ones?
4. The Southern states wanted slaves counted as people. Do you think they really believed the slaves were people? Why or why not?
5. The agreement on how to count slaves was called the Three-Fifths Compromise. Why do you think they called it that?

4

After months of argument and bitter discussions, the men finally reached agreement on how the government should be formed. They sent their drafts of the Constitution back to the states. If at least nine of the thirteen states voted to join, a new nation would be born. In each state government, there were more arguments among the men. Two state representatives even refused to go into the statehouse, so there would not be enough people to hold a vote. But men barged into their homes and dragged them through the streets of Philadelphia to the statehouse for a vote. At last, all of the states decided to adopt the Constitution. The United States had a government!

1. Why do you think it took months to agree on what the Constitution should say?
2. Why do you think they let each state vote on whether to adopt the Constitution? Why not just make the states do it?
3. Do you think the representatives who refused to go to the statehouse wanted to adopt the Constitution? Why or why not?
4. Do you think the men had the right to drag the representatives to the statehouse? Why or why not?
5. How do you think the men who drafted the Constitution felt when the last state voted to adopt it? Explain.





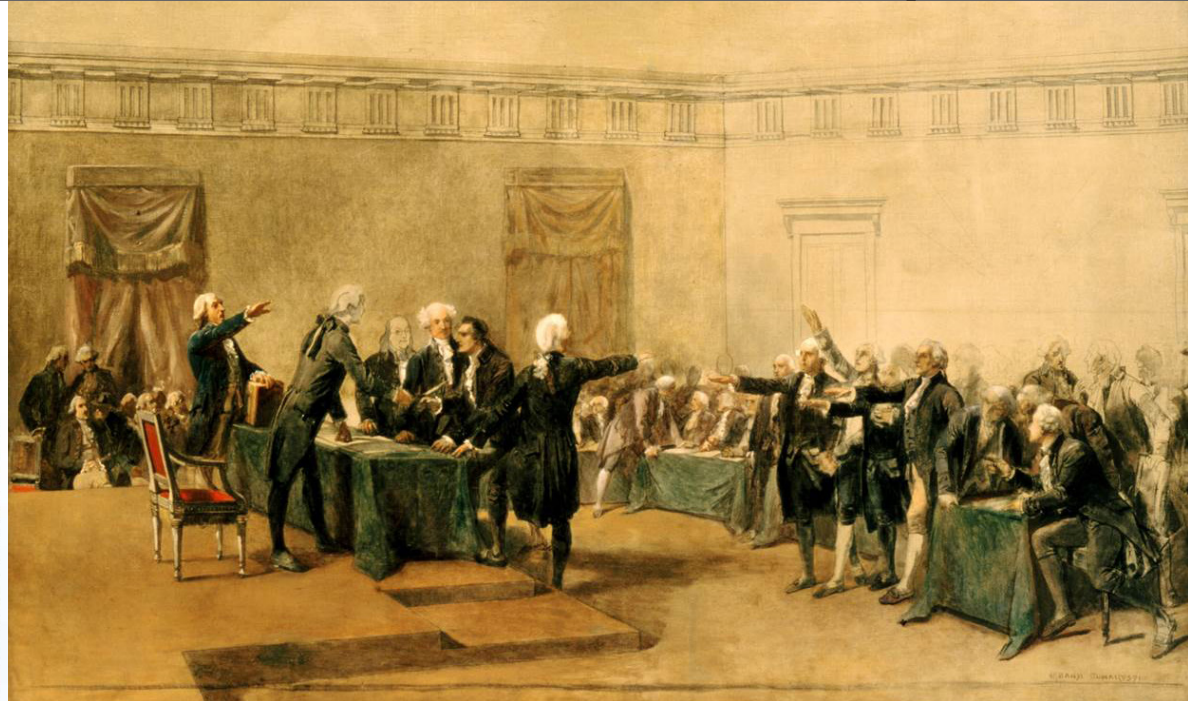
5

(clockwise from left) George Washington, by Gilbert Charles Stuart, 1796; the debate as envisioned by Robert Edge Pine, 1785; the signing of the Constitution, by Armand Dumaesq, 1873; the U.S Constitution



The work on the Constitution was far from over. The first Congress—made up of many of the same men who had met in Philadelphia—proposed ten Amendments. After much more discussion and argument, this Bill of Rights was adopted two years later. Freedoms of speech, of the press—most of the things that make the Constitution great were added later to that first draft from 1787. In the centuries since then, amendments have been added to abolish slavery, grant women and people of color the right to vote, and give all people equal protection under the law. People have fought hard for these changes in Congress, in the courts, in protest marches, and on the blood-soaked fields of the Civil War.

1. Why do you think the story said the work was “far from over”? Explain.
2. Do you think the first ten Amendments to the Constitution were good changes, or bad ones? Explain.
3. Why do you think the first ten Amendments are called the Bill of Rights?
4. Why do you think people have amended the Constitution in the years since then?
5. Why do you think people have had to fight for the changes to the Constitution? Why not just agree on everything?



Ivan says—

Now you're going on to a tough chapter in our history. The Constitution came under fire a lot, but one of the biggest fights was only about 70 years later. It was over slavery, a shameful practice, and it caused such a rift, the North and South went to war. The new United States was fighting itself!

Even though some of the Founding Fathers wanted the rights of the Constitution to apply to slaves, too, they couldn't achieve that at the time. But they did lay the foundation. Then the president in your next Flight, Lincoln, came along many years later and used that foundation to build a better house. Sometimes I go under my house to its foundation, where it's nice and cool. But I'll go to war on any other cat who tries to impose on my rights...to food, sun, and scratches under the chin.





Flight 3

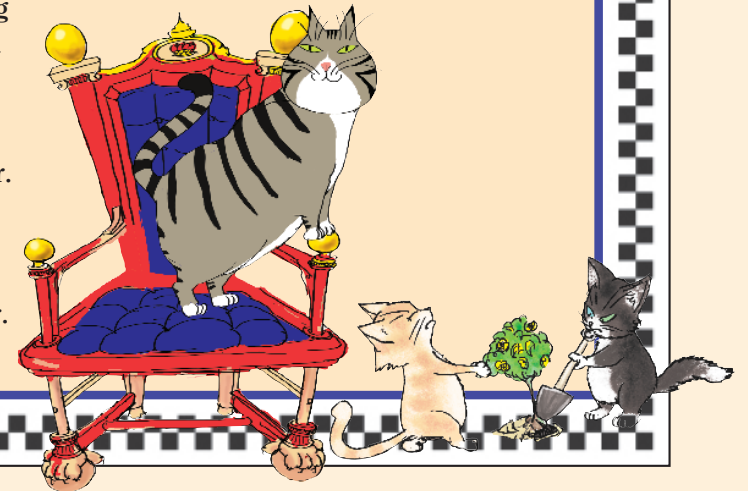
Father Abraham

1809-1865

This new Flight focuses on the most difficult part of Abraham Lincoln's presidency: the Civil War years. Any war is terrible, but this war was between the North and South of the United States, so families were set against their own relatives and states were fighting with states. It was an awful time in United States history.

Not only was the war about the federal government's power over the individual states, it was about abolishing the horrible practice of slavery. People had strong opinions, and Abe had to deal with them like squabbling children. He also had to keep his troops inspired and fighting for the cause. For those reasons and more, he became known as "Father Abraham."

I never thought about being a father.
I could be a pretty cool dad. I'd
just let the little kitties run around
tormenting the neighborhood dog
and digging up rosebushes next door.



The Peacemakers, by George P.A. Healy, 1868, depicts from left General-in-Chief Ulysses S. Grant, Major General William Tecumseh Sherman, Abraham Lincoln, and Rear Admiral David Dixon Porter.

1

When Abraham Lincoln was elected President, seven Southern states seceded—that is, tried to break off from the United States. Fearing that Lincoln would take away their right to own slaves, other states soon followed. Lincoln vowed to keep the Union together, and a few months after he took office the Civil War began. The war between the North and South was brutal and bloody and sometimes pitted families against each other. To keep up morale, Abe gave many inspiring speeches. But the war weighed heavily on his mind. He spent many long hours consoling the wives and mothers of fallen men and visiting the wounded in army hospitals.

1. Why do you think the Southern states feared Lincoln would take away their right to own slaves?
2. Why do you think Lincoln wanted to keep the Union together? Why not let the Southern states secede?
3. Why do you think the Civil War pitted family against family?
4. Why do you think the war weighed heavily on Abe's mind?
5. How do you think the wounded men felt when Abe visited them in army hospitals?

2

As the Civil War raged on, the troops began to doubt the Union was worth dying for. In the fall of 1862, the Union army barely won one of the bloodiest battles of the war. A few days after the battle, Lincoln issued the "Emancipation Proclamation." This bold statement declared that any slaves held in rebel states "are, and henceforward shall be, free." Crowds cheered at the news in cities across the North. The Union troops now knew they were fighting to end slavery, a cause they believed in. With their spirits raised, the weary men fought on.

1. Why do you think the troops started to doubt the Union was worth dying for?
2. Why do you think Lincoln freed the slaves in rebel states?
3. Do you think the people in the North were happy about the Emancipation Proclamation, or sad? Explain.
4. How do you think people in the South felt about the Emancipation Proclamation?
5. Why do you think the Emancipation Proclamation raised the spirits of the Northern troops?



3 In the fall of 1863, people gathered in a grassy meadow near Gettysburg. Five months earlier, a fierce three-day battle left more than 50,000 dead or wounded, and folks had come to mourn the soldiers buried there. Lincoln came to show his support and was asked to speak. A hush fell on the crowd as the solemn man stepped up on a wooden platform. He only spoke for two minutes, but his words brought tears to many eyes. He reminded them that the troops fought not just to save the Union or free the slaves but to preserve all democracy. The crowd was awed by this Gettysburg Address.

1. Why do you think people came to mourn the soldiers at Gettysburg?
2. Do you think only the families of the soldiers buried there came to Gettysburg? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think Lincoln came to show his support?
4. Why do you think Lincoln was solemn when he stepped onto the platform to speak?
5. Why do you think Lincoln's words brought tears to people's eyes?

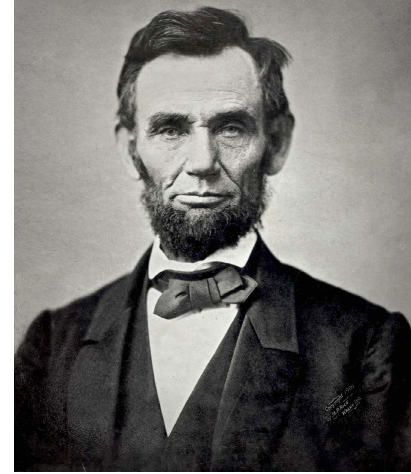
4 The years of war were difficult for President Lincoln. He hardly slept and often didn't eat. He grew thin, with deep wrinkles on his face from all his worries. Still, the strained man tried to ease the minds and hearts of those around him. Many took to calling him "Father Abraham." When the rebels finally laid down their guns, Lincoln urged both sides to be forgiving. To join the divided country, he told the people they had to heal the wounds of war, with "malice toward none...charity for all."

1. Why do you think President Lincoln grew so thin?
2. Why do you think the story describes Lincoln as "strained"?
3. Why do you think people called him "Father Abraham"?
4. Do you think people would have forgiven each other after the war, if Lincoln had not urged them to? Explain.
5. What might have happened if people did not forgive each other after the war?





(clockwise from left) *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, by Fletcher Cranson; Lincoln, November, 1863; *The Last Hours of Lincoln*, by Alonzo Chappel; *First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation*, Francis Bicknell Carpenter, 1864



5

Less than a week after the war's end, Abe took his wife to see a play at Ford's Theatre. They sat in the president's box seats in a balcony high above the stage. When the gas lamps dimmed for the show, John Wilkes Booth, an actor, snuck up behind them. Booth, who supported the South, aimed a small pistol at the back of Abe's head and fired. As Mary Todd screamed, Booth leapt from the box to the stage. He broke his leg but still managed to flee on horseback. Friends carried Lincoln to a nearby house and rushed to get a doctor. When Abe died the next morning, the whole nation wept with his widow.

1. Why do you think the Lincolns went to a play?
2. Why do you think John Wilkes Booth *snuck* up behind Abe? Why not make a lot of noise?
3. Why do you think John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln?
4. Why do you think Booth jumped to the stage? Why not leave the way he came in?
5. How do you think people felt when they heard the news that Abe had died?



Ivan says—

Abe was one of the best, leaving a rich legacy. What might he have accomplished if he hadn't been assassinated? No one will ever know. The types of injustice in the world when he was president make me angry and sad at the thought of that happens.

Well, now that you know about Lincoln, read about President Barack Obama. His father was from Africa. Obama would not have had a chance to be elected without all the work Abe Lincoln, along with a lot of other people, did. Compare and contrast these two fine gentlemen, and you'll see lots of interesting things.

Meanwhile, I am going to take a long walk. That sets me right. Then I don't have to think about how much better off you humans would be if you were cats instead.





Flight 4

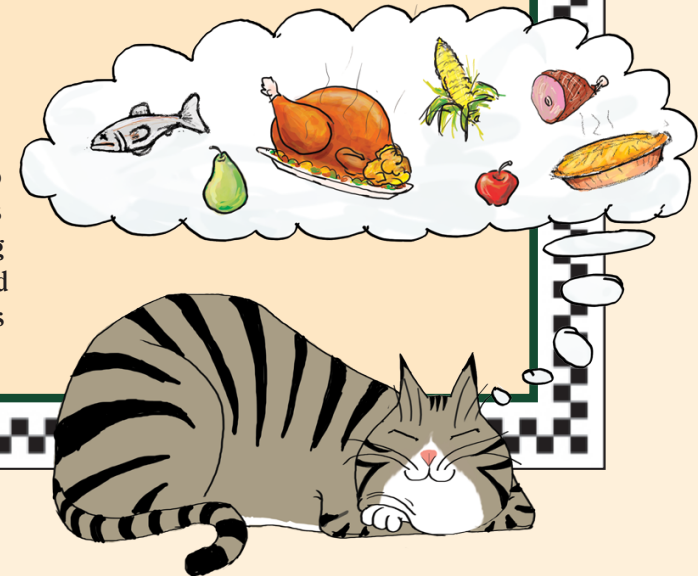
Barack Obama

1961 - Present

This new Flight tells the story of the first black U.S president. It took over 140 years, since the end of the Civil War and slavery, for this momentous event. I think Lincoln would have cheered. Obama faced long odds at first, and racism still persists in the U.S. But finally the country was ready...or at least a majority of voters were!

Change is slow in societies, especially a large nation like the U.S. It takes a lot of people doing little things to do big things. It takes education, voting, marching and protesting, and exercising those rights guaranteed to you under the Constitution. That you can change things is what makes this country great.

Now, if you really want great, you need to elect a cat. We know the important things in life: napping, eating, napping, sneaking around outside, napping, being petted and scratched, and napping. These are policies I think everyone could get behind.



1

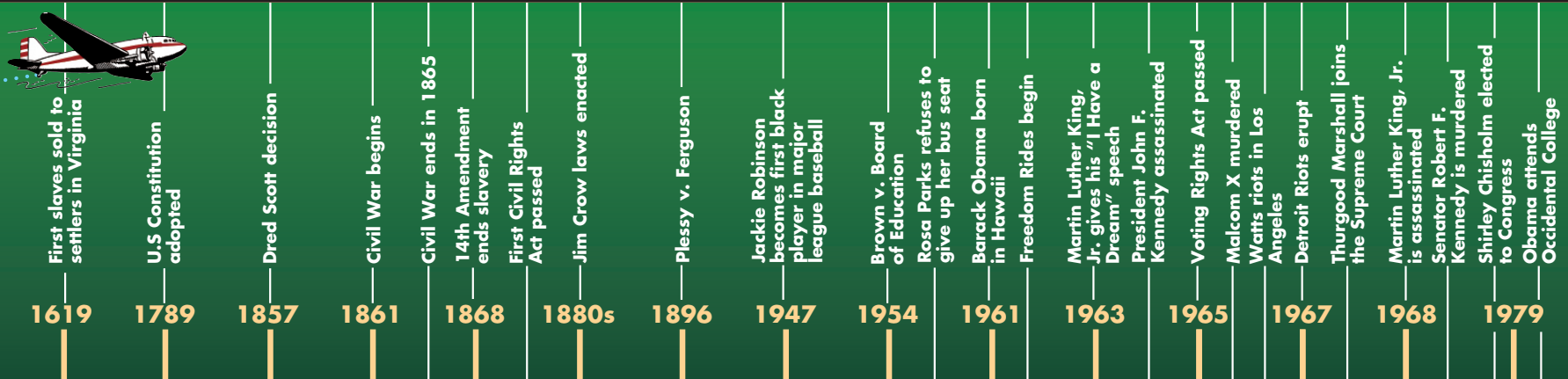
Barack Obama became the first black man to become President of the United States. His journey to the White House was unusual, beginning with his unique childhood. Barack was born in Hawaii in 1961. His mother was a white woman from Kansas and his father a black man from Kenya. At the time, interracial marriages were rare. The couple split up a few months after Barack's birth. Soon his father went back to Africa. After that, Barack saw his father only once when he was ten.

1. What do you think is the main idea of the story?
2. Do you think Obama was excited to be the first black President of the U.S.? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think the story calls Obama's childhood unique?
4. Why do you think interracial marriages were rare when Obama was born?
5. How do you think Obama felt, only seeing his father once, when he was ten? Explain.

2

When Barack was a young boy his mother married an Indonesian man. Soon they moved far away to live in Jakarta. There, young Barack went to Indonesian-language schools for a few years. His mother also homeschooled him in the evenings, in English. He was the son of a Caucasian woman and an African man, living in Asia. Because of this he often felt out of place. When he was ten, he went to live with his grandparents in Hawaii.

1. Why do you think Obama and his family moved to Jakarta, Indonesia?
2. Why do you think Obama's mother homeschooled him in English in the evenings?
3. Why do you think Obama felt "out of place" living in Asia?
4. Do you think there were many children with black fathers and white mothers at Obama's school in Jakarta? Why or why not?
5. Why do you think Obama went to live with his grandparents in Hawaii?



3

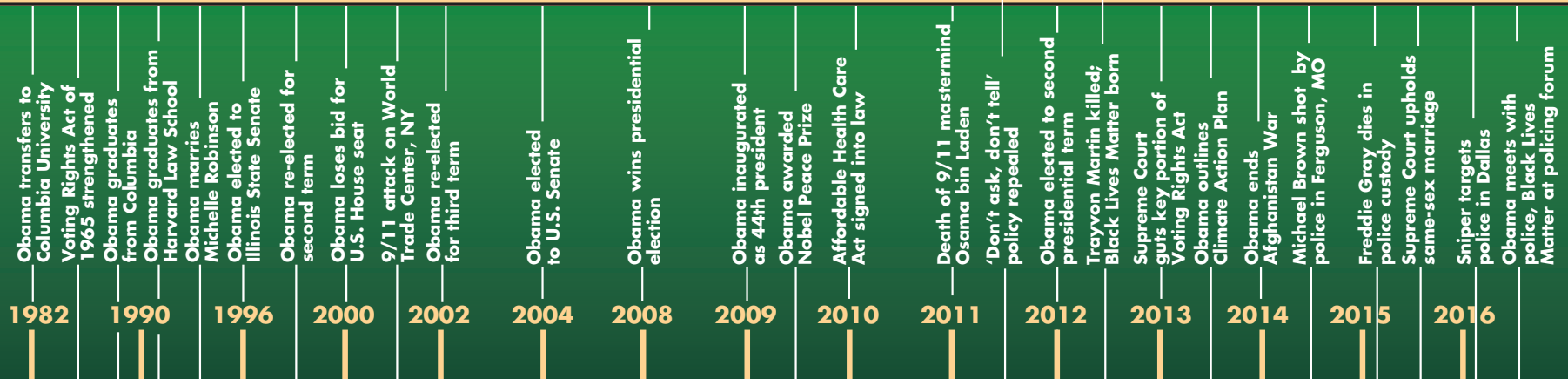
Barack did well in school and later attended college in New York City. After he graduated, he worked in Chicago helping poor people. He helped set up programs to tutor kids who wanted to go to college and train people looking for jobs. He made speeches urging people to vote. Then he went back to school to become a lawyer. He did so well at Harvard Law School that he was elected the first black editor of the law review.

1. Why do you think Obama did well in school?
2. Why do you think Obama tried to help poor people? Why not help rich people?
3. Why do you think Obama set up programs for kids who needed tutors?
4. Why do you think Obama urged people to vote?
5. Do you think Obama was proud to be the first black editor of Harvard's law review? Why or why not?

4

Before long Obama was elected to the State Senate in Illinois. From there he went to the U.S. Senate. Within months, he was asked to give an important speech. Obama's speech was so powerful that he became well known overnight. A few years later, Barack Obama chose to run for President. He traveled the country, talking to people and shaking thousands of hands along the way. His speeches made people pay attention. After more than a year on the campaign trail, he won the election.

1. How do you think Obama got elected to the Illinois state senate?
2. Why do you think Obama was asked to give an important speech?
3. Do you think Obama was good at giving speeches? Why or why not?
4. How do you think people felt when they heard this "powerful" speech? Explain.
5. Why do you think Obama shook thousands of hands?





(clockwise from left) President Barack Obama, first official portrait, 2009; Obama taking Oath of Office with wife Michelle, 2009; in the Oval Office at the White House; with Supreme Court, including Justice Sonia Sotomayor, one of two justices he appointed.



Obama was sworn in as President in January of 2008 before over a million people. Among the guests who sat near the front were civil rights leaders. These men and women had marched for the rights of people of color in the 1950's and 1960's. When they were young, black people did not have the same rights as whites. They could not drink from the same fountains as whites, play the same sports, or sit in the same sections in restaurants. Now they were witnessing a black man become President. Many of them wept.

1. Why do you think thousands of people watched Obama get sworn in as President?
2. Why do you think some of the leaders of the civil rights movement got to sit near the front?
3. Do you think Obama could have won the election if not for the civil rights movement? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think black people did not have the same rights as whites?
5. Why do you think many of the civil rights leaders wept?



Ivan says—

So we close out our special packet on the Constitution with our 44th president. We only allow two terms to a president—another amendment to the Constitution—so Obama can't run again. Letting a feller serve term after term would be too much like the all-powerful kings our Founding Fathers were rebelling against!

Imagine the dedication and hard work it takes to get all the way to president! Try to picture the stress of that job! One president, Harry Truman, had a plaque on his desk that said, "The buck stops here!" But the top boss has the top pressure, too!

Some people are happy with a president when he is done, some aren't. But no one can deny that Obama passed more progressive legislation than any president since Lyndon Johnson. That's pretty impressive! I like getting new presidents so often. I like variety. That's why I have a fully stocked pantry of different flavors of cat food.

